

# THE MIRACLE OF MIND

by

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**IN BLESSING OF**

**SIEW LIN LEE**

# **The miracle of mind**

No one ever has seen mind. Even highly qualified psychologists have never seen or being able to demonstrate mind. Yet every one knows that it exists. It is an extraordinary, mysterious and unique something that we can keep on discussing, talking and even arguing endlessly. From the time immemorial scholars, priests, psychologists and various scientists have speculated on this wonderful thing called mind. However, even today, the psychologists do not claim that they know what the mind is. They can only study behaviour of beings and from the behaviour they observe make the inference that mind exists.

In Buddhism mind is given a highly significant place. The Buddha has stated that mind precedes all our activities. All our verbal, mental and physical actions are intentional and therefore said to be mind made. The Buddha has delivered many sermons on this important subject. As a matter of fact, entire teaching of the Buddha is based on mind. The Buddha analysed mind and

presented a programme for the development of it. The well known summary statement of the Buddha's teaching, which runs as, indicates that the control of mind as the climate of the discipline.

**Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ –  
Kusalassa upasampadā  
Sacitta pariyodapanam –  
Etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ**

Not to do any evil<sup>1</sup>, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is the Teaching of the Buddhas.

Bodhidharma, who introduced Zen Buddhism to China, had an encounter with a local Buddhist king. The king who happened to hear about the foreign monk in his state sent for him with a view of discussing Dhamma with him. The king enquired about the purpose of his visit to China. Then Bodhidharma revealed that he came to China to share his knowledge of Buddhism with

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1 What is associated with the three immoral roots of attachment (lobha), illwill (dosa), and delusion (moha) is evil. What is associated with the three moral roots of generosity (alobha), goodwill or loving-kindness (adosa), and wisdom (amoha) is good.

people there. When the king wanted to know what the Buddha taught as his Dhamma, the monk, referring to the above mentioned summary of Buddha's teachings, said "Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is the Teaching of the Buddhas" The king exclaimed, rather impudently, "What a simple thing! Do you need to come all that distance just to teach such a simple and naïve thing? Even a small boy can say this." Bodhidharma responded saying "Yes, your majesty. It sounds as simple as even a child can say that. Yet, there are kings and many generations of men who could not practice it well even within the full stretch of their life."

As implied in this message presented in the stanza of Dhammapada (verse 183), it appears that this is a heavy commitment. It is a life-long undertaking of ethical living and mental culture leading to perfection. Easier said than done. Among the three tasks recommended in the stanza the most difficult one is the third item – purify one's mind.

There are many kinds of energies in the world. When we look around we can observe how energy is used for various purposes. There are

physical energies like electricity. However, among the many forms of energy, the energy of mind is the most powerful. There is nothing more powerful than the power of mind. No other thing is as miraculous as mind. In the **Ekaka Nipāta** of **Anguttara Nikāya** the Buddha says: "Monks, mind travels very fast. It changes very fast too. It is so fast that even a simile is not possible." Thus it is clear that nothing can be placed in analogy to mind. It is unique. Its speed is incomparable. The fastest known speed in the realm of physics is the speed of light. Even if we multiply it thousand times, we cannot get any closer to the speed of mind. It is so fast and quick to change.

The **Suppāvāsa sutta** of **Khuddaka Nikāya** illustrates this point well. In that sutta, a devotee was given an opportunity of offering alms by Arahant **Moggallāna**. Knowing that Arahant **Moggallāna** is incomparable in his miraculous powers, the devotee wants to know whether the Arahant **Moggallāna** can guarantee that he would live to offer the agreed alms to Sangha. Arahant **Moggallāna** assures him of that. Then he wanted to know whether the Arahant can assure that his money reserved for alms giving would not be stolen by thieves until he materialise his goal of



giving the alms. When that was also assured the devotee asked Arahant **Moggallāna** whether he could assure that his faith would continue to prevail until he performs the alms giving. To his amazement, Ven. **Moggallāna**'s answer was a categorical 'No'. The nature of human mind is such that even an extremely powerful arahant cannot predict or guarantee that a person's mind remains unchanged even for a short time. It may change unpredictably and instantly even from a positive view to a negative view. Someone who seem to be of good faith now might turn to be a faithless **micchāditthika** within a very short time and a person who is faithless and even criminal may change to be a good follower of right path very soon. Nature of mind is more agile, skipy and swift than a fish out of water.

No one knows exactly where the mind is located. But everyone knows that it can travel very fast and go long way even before we notice what it does. It has unimaginable ability of day dreaming and moving fast. A good example given in the tradition is the way the monk called **Bhāgineyya Sangharakkhita**, who lived during the time of the Buddha, day dreamed and ended up beating his master with the fan. He was ordained under the

tutelage of his uncle who was an Arahant monk called **Sangharakkhita**. The young monk came to be known **Bhāgineyya Sangharakkhita** as he was the nephew (**bhāgineyya** in **Pāli**) of Ven. **Sangharakkhita**. He was once offered with a set of robes by a devotee which he thought of offering to his uncle monk. He approached the Ven. **Sangharakkhita** who was sitting resting on a chair and offered the set of robes with respect saying "Venerable sir, please accept this kindly for my benefit. It was offered to me by a devotee, but I thought it was more suitable to you Venerable sir." The teacher monk asked him to put them aside and ordered "Fan me", giving him a fan.

The pupil, in fact, was expecting a better response than that. He thought the master would delightedly accept it and thank him in appreciative words. Though emotionally upset the young monk had no alternative than taking the fan and fanning the master. While fanning the teacher, his mind, which was badly hurt by the teacher's neutral response, kept worrying about his future. "What is the use of living near a heartless and ungrateful teacher like my uncle! How long should I stand this kind of ill-treatment?" His thoughts took him back to lay life. "I would better disrobe and go

back to my lay family. I might get some money by selling these two robes. I can cut and sell grass to earn more money. I will buy a cow when I had raised enough money and then I will be able to sell milk. With my ability of doing good business and saving money I will soon become an owner of a large dairy farm. Then I will have some recognition in the village and definitely young village damsels will wish to have me for a husband. I will marry a beautiful wife and have a child as well. How lucky I will be! A rich and happy family man! Then I will buy a carriage drawn by oxen and one day will visit this uncle of mine. On the way to temple my wife might drop the child in the cart and he may cry. Then I will beat my wife with the stick that I beat the oxen." So thinking he gave a blow on the head of the uncle monk with the handle of the fan. Within that short period a long series of incidents was imagined by the nephew.

Such is the creative visual potential of human mind. Every one has this kind of day dreaming habit.

It is with regard to such nature of mind that the Buddha has said "Faring far, wondering

alone<sup>1</sup>, bodiless<sup>2</sup>, lying in a cave<sup>3</sup>, is the mind. Those who tame it are free from the bond of Māra”

**Dūraṅgamaṃ ekacaraṃ  
Asarīraṃ guhāsayam  
Ye cittaṃ saññamessanti  
Mokkhanti mārabandhanā**

Mind wonders swiftly to far away places, faster than anything else. Distance does not matter. And

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1. Because no two thought moments arise at a particular time.
  2. The imperceptible mind is immaterial and colourless.
  3. **Guhāsayam** – i.e. the seat of consciousness.

It is clear that the Buddha had not definitely assigned a specific basis for consciousness as He had done with the other senses. It was the cardiac theory (the theory that the heart is the seat of consciousness) that prevailed in His time, and this was evidently supported by the Upanishads. The Buddha could have adopted this popular theory, but He did not commit Himself. In the **Paṭṭhāna**, the Book of Relations, the Buddha refers to the basis of consciousness in such indirect terms as **yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya**, dependent on that material thing. What the material thing was the Buddha did not positively assert. According to the views of commentators like the Ven. Buddhaghosa and Anuruddha the seat of consciousness is the heat (**Hadaya vatthu**).

One wonders whether one is justified in presenting the cardiac theory as Buddhist when the Buddha Himself neither rejected nor accepted this popular theory.

it is not restricted by time. Now in the past, next in the future, it can go back and forth. And the mind travels alone, unaccompanied by any one. It has no material body either. Yet it has a 'cave' to sleep in. Its cave is nothing but this fathom long body. If we take hold of this rather elusive thing we call mind, the Buddha says, we can become liberated from the shackles of Mara, the evil one.

So far so good. The problem is how to tame this wild mind. People call it monkey mind as it does not stay a single second without moving. It jumps from one object to the other. If external objects are not there or we close our sense doors to the external world the mind begins to harness its own memory bank. There are many billions of things that have got seeped into the memory and the mind brings them into surface. Getting this busy mind into rest is absolutely difficult. We sit cross-legged to meditate and select an object to concentrate on, thinking we will make our mind one pointed. In a fraction of a second our mind loosens our grip and begins to wonder here and there. It needs years of practice before we attain the quality generally called **Samādhi**. It is said that taming a wild buffalo is easier than taming the mind. In one stanza in **Bhagavad Geethā**, it



is said that keeping the mind at one point is even difficult that trying to arrest wind. Yet it does not mean that the mind can never be controlled. The simile is given only to indicate the difficulty of the task. Mind can be controlled by systematic meditation.

During the time of the Buddha there lived a monk called Khadiravaniya Revata. He was called Khadiravaniya because the forest where he used to live was full of Khadira trees. It was prone to incessant wild fires. Within that hot, uncomfortable forest, amidst the difficult living conditions, Venerable Revata managed to concentrate his mind and attain Arahantship. Once the Buddha wished to visit his forest dwelling pupil and set off with many followers, including Arahants and non-Arahants. When Venerable Revata came to know that the Buddha was visiting his forest with many monks, he, with his miraculous powers, created a beautiful large monastery for them to reside. The Buddha and the retinue spend a few days there comfortably. Some monks who had not attained any spiritual heights thought that Ven Revata lived a luxurious life in the forest. "What is the difference in living here from living in Jetavana? This is much more

comfortable than living in a city.” they commented. Having come to know of their wrong impressions, Venerable Revata, by his supernormal powers, made them forget some of their things on the day they left the forest. On their way back, they realised that they had forgotten certain things and came back to collect them to find the magnificent monastery they lived was not there. Instead they found Venerable Revata in a small leaf hut living in humble surroundings. Only then they realised that Arahant Revata had created that decent monastery for them to live in comfort during their stay in the forest. This shows us that mind is such a marvellous thing that, if developed, is able to create wonderful things.

There is an interesting Zen story that illustrates the nature of mind. There was a newly married young couple. They lived happily for some time, but, unfortunately, the wife got seriously ill. Knowing that she would definitely die she asked her husband not to marry another woman after her death. “If you bring another woman to this house, I will come as a demon and punish you severely.” she warned. After the death of his wife this man lived unmarried for some time and even forgot about her threatening words. People started

bringing him proposals for a new wife. Eventually he agreed to marry a beautiful girl. That night his former wife appeared in very angry form and asked "Didn't you go to see a new woman? I saw all that. If you marry her I will cause you disaster." Every time he visits the intended bride the ghost would appear at night and tell everything he did day time and repeat her threat. "How could she tell all that happened in daytime if she were not real? She is a real threat. How can I marry again?" he wondered. In desperation he confessed his problem to a friend who, then, accompanied him to a learned monk. The monk knew that it was his mind and not a ghost that troubled him. In order to solve the problem, he instructed the man to take a fist-full of soy beans wrapped in a piece of paper and keep it with him. "The powerful ghost of your wife will come tonight as well and report all what you have done today. Then challenge her to tell you the number of beans you had wrapped in this paper." the monk instructed him.

At night the ghost appeared as usual and started revealing what he had done during the day and made the usual threat. Then man asked the ghost "If you are so capable tell me how many beans are there in the pack" The ghost disappeared



immediately and never came back. The ghost was not real. It was only the fear that had seeped into the man's unconscious mind.

Mind is a uniquely miraculous thing. When it is under or control and well maintained by us it can do marvels. In the **Upāli Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya)** the Buddha tells **Upāli** how difficult it is for a king to destroy a city. A king has to wage war and destroy buildings, kill people and animals and many destructive tasks. Yet the Buddha states that if a yogi, a hermit with meditatively achieved miracle powers, may destroy a city in a matter of seconds. He can even create physical things in a flash just using the powers that he has acquired through meditation.

And, in order to substantiate his position that mind is more powerful than matter, the Buddha provided **Upāli** a story of the past. There were a group of ascetics who were of handsome physical looks and good health. The reason for their good looks and health was nothing but their composure of mind. However, at a later date, they failed to maintain the same high quality of mind. With the deterioration of mental quality their physical health and good looks faded away soon.

Even when the body deteriorates the mind can remain young and healthy if we keep it active and positive. While the body of a positive person becomes weak and feeble with age, his mind may get even sharper. Mind, unlike the body, gets developed if we provide necessary care for it. Moreover, if we can think that we are mentally young and active that helps for our mental wellbeing. That is why the positivist psychologists instruct us not to get worried thinking that we are getting weak with age. If we can look the positive side of growing old we may remain comparatively younger than who keep worrying about their age. Of course many people get disheartened when others keep you addressing with terms like grandpa, grandma, uncle, aunty and the like, some people get worried. When people may address us with such age-appropriate terms we have to think that we are still fit both physically and mentally. Perhaps it is the reason why some people like to indicate their age as 'I am sixty years young' not 'I am sixty years old'.

Sometimes people are not able to maintain their mental balance. For instance, when their economy is down turn they get worried and become highly frustrated. When their marriage

fails or even when children become independent some people get mentally confused. Problems of life should not deter us. Even when we are faced with problems we have to think positive. We should never think negatively. Temporary failure is not the end of the world. We must think of new ways and encounter any situation with confidence. If there is a will there are multiple opportunities open to us. We have to maintain our determination and courage. A systematic and methodical mind can find thousand opportunities even at the point of disaster.

Buddhism is a technique of mental development. It harnesses the full potential of mind to achieve the highest goal possible for a man – Liberation from suffering. However, the programme of mental development in Buddhism begins with elimination of defilements. Nothing good will be achieved with impurities in mind. The Buddha gives the simile of dyeing a cloth. If a piece of cloth we are given to dye is soiled with dirt we may not obtain bright and beautiful colours by dyeing. But a well cleaned piece of cloth absorbs dye very well and produces nice colours. In analogy to that when our mind is defiled with impurities like lust, hatred and delusion absorbing

of quality Dhamma is impossible. In the **Sangarava Sutta** a Brahmin tells the Buddha that some Brahmins can learn Veda more efficiently than others and they can recite any part, when required, by memory. However, he adds, that there are some others who find learning by heart is utterly difficult. He wanted the Buddha to explain why it is easy for some and utterly difficult to some others.

The then explained to him of the five factors that course mind defiled and learning difficult. Lust (**Kāmacchanda**), hatred (**Vyāpāda**), sloth and torpor (**thīnamiddha**), restlessness and scruples (**uddhacca Kukkucca**) and sceptical doubt (**vicikicchā**) are the defiling factors the Buddha highlighted as defiling factors.

When a coin is held over a clean and still water the reflection of the coin is clearly visible. A mind free of lust is like clean water. Lust confuses mind and prevents mind from grasping what one has to master. It is like mixing colour dye into water. The Buddha likens hatred to boiling water. As glass of boiling water may not reflect a coin the mind agitated with hatred will not help learn any good thing. And the water left for a long

time will be grown with algae and get discoloured; so it will not reflect a coin. The same way a mind full of sloth and torpor will not lend to learning. A mind obsessed with restlessness and scruples is like moving water. As the moving water will not be reflective the mind which is restless and scruple will also not be conducive for learning. If our mind is always obsessed with doubts how can it retain any good thing? We may take nothing serious and try to refuse everything as meaningless. The Buddha therefore instructs us to have a positive, cool and calm mind for learning higher truths.

The message of the Buddha given to us is that we must treasure our mind and look after it well. We must keep it out of defilements and shining bright to achieve higher attainments and ultimately the highest bliss- Nibbana.







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